WARD HILL LAMON: LINCOLN'S "PARTICULAR FRIEND"

By

LAVERN MARSHALL HAMAND

B.S., Illinois Wesleyan University, 1940
A.M., University of Illinois, 1947

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in history at the Graduate College of the University of Illinois, 1949

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In a sense, all dissertations are cooperative works. You choose a subject under the supervision of an adviser. Investigations in the source depositories are made with the suggestions of the personnel. And when you put your thoughts on paper, the aid given by an adviser, friends, and if you are fortunate, an English teacher-wife, completes the picture. In the process of evolving a thesis many people cooperate to help produce it. This is my opportunity to thank them in a small way for their parts.

One of the first things I learned when I went to work among the great manuscript collections in Washington was a deep respect for the people who care for them. They know so much about their materials and are so willing to help. In particular I recall the kindnesses of Dr. C. Percy Powell of the Library of Congress Manuscripts Division, Dr. W. Neil Franklin, and Miss Helen Beach of the Courts and Justice branch, the National Archives. Here in Illinois at the Abraham Lincoln Association Miss Marion Bonzi was very helpful, and from Miss Margaret A. Flint, Reference Librarian at the State Historical Library, I received the benefit of her vast knowledge of Illinois manuscripts and personages. The Huntington Library in San Marino, California, offers the student the most beautiful surroundings I encountered in my research; inside I found Dr. Dixon Wecter Dr. Herbert C. Schulz, and above all, Miss Norma B. Cuthbert, always ready to help. There were others, in Washington and San Marino, to say nothing of the fine people in the University Library, who deserve mention if space allowed.

I am most deeply indebted to Dr. J. G. Randall for many things; he suggested the topic; he secured appointments; he advised and criticized. To him and Mrs. Randall, who was kind enough to read several chapters and showed a constant interest I offer grateful thanks. These personal acknowledgments would not be complete without some mention of Mme Dorothy Lamon Teillard, who told me about her father. Last but not least, is Martha T. Hamand, speller, grammarian, and typist, to whom I owe so much.

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The inauguration of Abraham Lincoln on that tense day in March, 1861, was witnessed by a proud group of intimates who had accompanied him to Washington. It included his family and relatives, his secretaries, Nicolay and Hay, and several of those Illinois friends who had done much to secure him the office he now assumed. The four-year association with the newly-elected President brought some of this group fame and fortune. Several became biographers, while others merely received comfortable jobs and later returned to obscurity. But there was one who had the dubious distinction of enjoying all these fruits of victory: in the present fame, popularity, and fleeting fortune; in the future a biography, but also bitter criticism and financial distress. That man was Ward Hill Lamon.

The story of how Lamon came to be with the new President on inauguration day began in the upper Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. The Lamons, pronounced Lam'on, and his mother's family, the Wards, settled in the area between Winchester and Martinsburg sometime in the pre-Revolutionary period. Ward Hill Lamon was born near Winchester on January 6, 1828. Two years later the family moved to the village of Bunker Hill, Virginia, where Lamon grew up and received his education in the town school. While still in his teens Lamon taught the Bunker Hill school, then gave that up to study medicine under a local practitioner. But letters sent back by various cousins on the Illinois frontier aroused his interest in the opening prairie country, and in 1847 he migrated west, ostensibly to continue his studies under his cousin, Dr. Theodore Lemon, an individualist who insisted on the different spelling.

Soon after Lamon settled in Danville, Illinois, he switched professions. He read law with O. L. Davis, spent a winter in law school in Louisville, and in the spring of 1850 opened a practice in the Vermilion County seat. Lamon continued to live in Danville until February, 1857, and they were prosperous years. He met and soon became the local partner of Abraham Lincoln, soliciting business for the well-known Springfield lawyer to try when he came to Danville. He established a home, after returning to Virginia to elope with Angeline Turner, and he made many friends in the town and on the circuit. Lamon became the especial friend of the eighth circuit's "coterie" of Judge Davis, Abraham Lincoln, and Leonard Swett. These men, aided by his Danville friends, secured Lamon's election as prosecuting attorney for the circuit in the fall of 1856.

This young lawyer's rapid advancement in both position and friends presents a question: what kind of man was he to merit such attention? He was attractive in both appearance and personality. In the 1850's Lamon reached the full maturity of a splendid physical specimen. He was a tall man, six feet two inches, and his height was made even more impressive by stocky proportions; he was a physical giant who took much pride in his strength. Lamon's features were regular, with a cleft chin (when not covered by a heavy beard), rather generous mouth and well-shaped nose. His eyes were blue. A high forehead was outlined by a heavy mane of brown hair. Except for one period in middle life, Lamon wore a beard of some type; as a young man it was mustache and chin whiskers; later it was confined to a full mustache. Unlike Judge Davis, who was four inches shorter, Lamon managed from his middle years on to carry three hundred pounds with some grace, because of his large frame. There were few complexities to the personality of Ward Hill Lamon. He was of that type of genial extrovert who so develop because their great physical advantages give them

a sense of complete confidence in themselves. Such men love to display their athletic prowess and do on the slightest provocation. Their appetites are excessive; their capacities, enormous. They make friends easily. They give their trust freely, almost naively, and show great anger when it is violated. Such men are likely to be violent partisans, expressing their opinions plainly and openly. Lamon was that sort of open-handed genial extrovert with an overlay of Virginia-bred manners and tastes.

The new prosecutor moved to Bloomington, more nearly the center of the circuit, early in 1857; from there he made the rounds of the county seats, handling the state's cases in the numerous litigations that crowded the eighth's docket, and continuing to enjoy the confidence of the coterie. When the occasion demanded, he took time out to help his friend Lincoln campaign, as he did in the fall of 1858. His record as a prosecutor was respectable enough when recalling the large number of cases he was forced to handle. Most he tried personally and the rest he farmed out to friends, especially the more notorious murder trials, for which he did not have the time to prepare. Lincoln assisted in one such famous case, the Wyant murder trial.

Politics became a serious occupation to the coterie in 1860. As the year advanced, Lincoln's three friends took more and more interest in his behalf, each in his own way: Davis led the Lincoln organization at the Chicago Convention; Swett assisted him; and Lamon remained in the background until called upon to act. When it became necessary to wrest control of the gallery away from the Seward men to insure the loudest ovation when Lincoln's name was placed before the convention, Lamon and some friends spent the night forging passes. The same situation existed once the campaign was under way. Davis was well known in the East and elsewhere; Lamon worked in the circuit. But when he had won, Lincoln invited Lamon to accompany him to Washington, to stay. Now an Illinois "Colonel,"

Lamon was in the party that left from Springfield and he was the only Illinois man with the President-elect when Lincoln slipped quietly through Baltimore into Washington late in February, 1861. That was how the ex-Virginian lawyer and prosecutor came to know Abraham Lincoln and to be present on that inaugural day.

Lamon was among the select group that enjoyed the first meal in the Executive Mansion arranged for them by the outgoing President's hostess-niece. He continued to have easy access to the White House during the next four years, for it was well known in Washington that "Hill," as his friends always called him, was the Illinois President's closest personal friend. Such a relationship, and presently a remunerative appointment, opened all doors in the capital to the handsome young lawyer. He was personable, congenial, and convivial; he had an attractive wife and plenty of money. Popularity came easily with most groups. To the Radical-Abolitionist faction in Congress the southern-born and mannered friend of the President was a source of immediate and increasing irritation. They feared his influence with the President, disliked his having the marshalship of the District, and angrily protested his handling of the fugitive slave problem and the jail. The references to Lamon in the *Congressional Globe* do not reflect his general popularity around the city. The later supremacy of the Radicals in Republican politics did nothing to enhance Lamon's chances for further patronage positions. Regardless of his closeness to the party's idol during Lincoln's lifetime, the ex-marshal never again held office. The realistic Lamon biography of the President did not improve the situation, and to cinch the argument, Lamon was an outspoken supporter of Andrew Johnson.

A natural outgrowth of this situation has been a none-too-gentle treatment by writers on the Lincoln period. The contemporary biographers, seeing the dismal failure of the Lamon book,

hastened to be critical of both author and man. Some of this seeped through into the works of later writers. Lamon's personality—he was not temperate in habits or expressions—did not engender sympathy. A combination of these facts have made him an easy target for almost constant abuse. Comments ranging from the Chicago *Tribune's* calling him a "hyena feasting upon the dead body of Lincoln," in 1866, to the acid comments of David Donald in his recently published biography of William H. Herndon are to be found in Lincolniana everywhere. Some of the comment is mild, such as "Rabelaisian" in the case of Sandburg; Randall uses "swashbuckling." The writer can recall but one example of sympathetic treatment, the biographical sketch by the Danville, Illinois, historian, Clint Clay Tilton, who it must be admitted had a fondness for his subject.

Several reasons for this treatment of Lamon have already been given: his personality, quarrels with the party in power, and his biography, but there is still a further one. There has been an inclination to treat the Marshal as a political figure during those turbulent days. Writers have remembered his loudly professed hatred of Abolitionists, his incarceration of fugitive slaves, and his quarrels with Radical congressmen. An inference can be drawn from these occurrences that Lamon was a leading administration exponent of the moderate or even conservative viewpoint. Nothing is farther from the truth. Hill Lamon had no political influence whatever either in Illinois or Washington. His contacts with politics at home had been more personal than public. His only elective office came through the influence of Lincoln, David Davis, and Danville politicians. He was not even a delegate to the Chicago Convention, nor the Decatur one for that matter, although he played an important behind-the-scene role in gaining the nomination for Lincoln. The President appointed Lamon marshal of the District soon after he took office; but this position, while brining social prestige and a

lucrative return, had little or no political value. Here again in the capital the relationship was personal. The marshal had easy access to the Executive Mansion but it was as an intimate and not a politician. Mr. Lincoln enjoyed the company of this jovial old friend of the circuit days but he did not take counsel from him. There is ample proof of this: the tardy appointment of Davis to the bench and failure to defend Lamon when the Senate stripped him of the remunerative side of his job, to mention two.

Attempts to give Lamon political importance probably stem from the biography and not the days of the Lincoln administration. Various squabbles in which the Marshal indulged during his tenure in office were mainly personal feuds with various Congressmen. One exception was a quarrel between civil and military authorities over jurisdiction of fugitvie slaves. Although Lamon probably enjoyed it, he was merely upholding the law, outmoded though it might have been. But this imbroglio was settled privately by the principals, not by Congress, through the good offices of the Executive Mansion. The biography of Lincoln presents a different story. It was published in 1872, at a time when the party was carefully building up the Lincoln myth. It is easy to understand why the critics attacked this rather unflattering view of the popular martyred President. The fact that Lamon did not write the book—it was ghostwritten by his law partner Chauncey Black—was not know known of course to the reading public, and the abuse fell on the ex-marshal. The book was a complete failure financially, and the criticism of its supposed author universal. Even his old Illinois friends were critical. In short, the Lincoln biography in the minds of contemporaries attached a political importance to Lamon that he never deserved. His traducers accused him, in retrospect, of pro-slavery leanings, but worst of all, of debunking the party's idol. As a result he was bitterly attacked or ignored by the Lincoln

writers of later years. This was carried even to the point of Robert Todd Lincoln's blocking his appointment as postmaster of Denver on strictly personal grounds evolving from the biography.

The influence of Lamon's contemporaries cannot be used to explain the generally unkind attitude of modern writers. This can be attributed to the man himself. The "Colonel" possessed in ample quantities all the frailties of human nature. His appetites were large whether food, drink, tobacco, or high-flown phraseology; his letters abound in purple passages. He was careless to a painful degree in business matters, correspondence, with his money, and in public with his tongue. He always had a ready audience because his connection with the President was well known and the Colonel was not reticent on the subject. Lamon did have many endearing traits, but these were not readily apparent especially to those who read his letters or the comments of his contemporaries. It is not hard to understand why the flamboyant, often dramatic, Virginian has been subjected to rather severe criticism since that early February morning in 1861 when he accompanied the President-elect on his stealthy entrance into Washington.

It was not the purpose of this study to vindicate Ward Hill Lamon. It would be an impossible task and a useless one. To attempt to prove that Lamon was anything but what he was is a job the writer had no desire to assume. I was interested, however, in giving Lamon his rightful place in the Lincoln story. This has not been the case during the avalanche of biographies and studies that have descended over the years from Lincoln's many intimates, secretaries, admirers, and worshipers. The scholarly approach to a subject is an excellent but relatively recent thing.

Lamon was an intimate friend of Mr. Lincoln. Perhaps it can be put even stronger, he was the President's closest personal

friend. The Illinois Colonel's connection with the Lincoln administration was a purely personal one. He was asked to accompany the President to Washington to stay; he was given a good position enabling him to remain; and he continued to enjoy the benefits of an influential friendship as long as Mr. Lincoln lived. With the assassination Lamon faded from the picture. He had no political influence; he was merely the good friend of the President, but often he has been denied even this.

So much has been said in this discussion of Lamon's weaknesses that the question can be asked if he had any good qualities; obviously he did. Lamon possessed much personal charm. Physically he was a very handsome man until overindulgence coarsened him. He had a winning personality, a rather boisterous but well-developed sense of humor, and a good but untrained tenor voice; he was a convivial person. Such traits of personality were almost directly opposite those possessed by Mr. Lincoln but they probably explain the attraction Lamon held for the President. The two shared in common a sense of humor that had as a backdrop the old Illinois circuit days. Mr. Lincoln liked his marshal and enjoyed having him around. Hill could make the work-worn President laugh at his Negro dialect jokes and ballads. In return, Mr. Lincoln gave Lamon a good position in Washington, the exciting nerve center of the Union cause. This relationship between the President and his self-appointed body guard and "particular friend" continued until that night in Ford's Theatre when the life of the one and the public career of the other ended.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Compiling a bibliography on any subject in the Lincoln field is a difficult undertaking because of the great bulk of material; Lamon is at least mentioned in most Lincolniana. There is obviously no need to include all this vast collection, and for that reason, especially in the case of the secondary accounts, the bibliography was chosen on the basis of the information pertinent to this study. The source materials came from four major depositories. The most important was, of course, the Huntington Library, which has Lamon's papers; the other three were: the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the Illinois State Historical Library. Newspapers, which formed the next most important group and often were the only source on Lamon's early years in Illinois, were found everywhere: the Library of Congress, the Illinois State Historical Library, the Library and the Illinois Historical Survey of the University of Illinois, and the McLean County Historical Society. Published diaries, memoirs, reminiscences, and letters were also invaluable sources. At the end of the second volume of his biography of Lincoln (*Lincoln the President: Springfield to Gettysburg*, II, 343-400), J. G. Randall includes an excellent evaluation of Lincoln bibliography.

The writer had an additional source that was interesting as well as valuable but, as he soon found out, had to be treated with caution. Personal interviews with members of the Lamon family provided information unobtainable elsewhere. Dorothy Lamon Teillard, the Colonel's daughter, is now in her ninety-first year, surprisingly vigorous, mentally keen, and remarkable in her memory. She told the writer much during the pleasant Sunday afternoons spent with her in Washington; although some of it was understandably biased and occasionally inaccurate, Mme Teillard's personal recollections of her father helped greatly in

gaining a better understanding of his personality. Three of Mme Teillard's four living first cousins were interviewed, each contributing valuable items. Genealogical leads were furnished by a distant cousin, Judge Walter S. Lemon, of Paris, Illinois. Several further interviews outside the family were helpful, notably those with Mrs. Clint Clay Tilton of Danville, whose husband was very much interested in Lamon. The writer found that in most cases members of the family were quite willing to talk about "Hill," although their knowledge was limited and often repetitious; associations with Lincoln were readily recalled, but personal details of Lamon's life were not so easily remembered. By piecing together the fragments contributed during these interviews with the family, the writer was able to reconstruct certain phases of Lamon's life that had disappeared from the more conventional sources. The best example of this technique was Lamon's second marriage; a biographer (Tilton) pictured Sally Logan and Hill Lamon as happily married, when actually, after the war years, they were rarely together for more than short periods of time until the last two years of Mrs. Lamon's life. If used wisely, and often sparingly, the material gained from the interviews formed a valuable addition to the rest of the sources.

VITA

Lavern Marshall Hamand was born in Marshall, Illinois, February 16, 1918, the son of Charles Wesley Hamand and Ruth Marden Hamand. He was graduated from Mt. Sterling Community High School, Mt. Sterling, Illinois, in May, 1936, and from Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois, with the degree of Bachelor of Science, in June, 1940. From 1940 until 1942 he taught social science courses and English in the Rosiclare Community High School, Rosiclare, Illinois, and attended summer school at the University of Illinois. His teaching was interrupted by the war. He entered the Air Forces as a private in March, 1942, and was discharged a first lieutenant four years later, in May, 1946.

In June, 1946, Hamand entered the Graduate College of the University of Illinois. He was granted the degree of Master of Arts in History in June, 1947. He held a teaching assistantship in the History Department from February, 1947, to June, 1948, and received research assistantships in Washington, D. C., during the summer of 1947, and for the academic year, 1948-1949.

He was married to Martha Elizabeth Tendick of Greenfield, Illinois, on June 9, 1943. He is a member of Tau Kappa Epsilon and Phi Alpha Theta.